



Sr. Barbara Winkler, MSC

Born in Philadelphia, PA in November 1948, I credit my mother who was a devout and committed Catholic for nourishing my faith. One of six children, I was blessed to have a Catholic school education. Attending primary school at St. Peter's Parish in the city and later moving to St. Bonaventure Parish, I was influenced especially by the Sisters of St. Francis who taught me in Grades 4-8. Spending a good amount of time helping the sisters before and after school hours, I grew close to them.

God planted the call to become a religious sister in my heart at a very early age and my desire to give my life to God and in service of others slowly grew. During my freshman year at Little Flower High School, I was invited personally by a faculty member, a Missionary Sister of the Sacred Heart, to join other young women for gatherings at St. Henry Convent. In this way, I came to know the MSC sisters who served at the parish school, and I was drawn to the Sacred Heart Spirituality. I completed my high school education at St. Michael's in Reading, PA where I joined other young women seeking religious life. These years brought me great joy and further deepened my desire to become a religious sister.

Along with ten other young women, I entered the novitiate to be formed as a Missionary Sister of the Sacred Heart in the fall of 1966. I did undergraduate studies at Alvernia College in Reading, PA for two years during the formation process. I was grateful that I could pursue a degree in Elementary Education as I had long aspired to become a teacher. After completing the formation program, I made my First Profession of Vows on August 22, 1969.

Prepared and ready, I was sent on my first mission at St. John the Baptist School, an MSC parish located in Haycock Run, Revere, PA. Being the second oldest parish in the Philadelphia Diocese, the small church community had a long and rich history. The convent near the church was simple. We were materially poor, but I experienced some of my happiest memories living with our MSC sisters and teaching first graders at the school for four years. I loved children, so teaching and forming them brought me joy and the parents were very cooperative.

Each summer I continued studies for an undergraduate degree at Alvernia College in Reading, PA. Continuing my initial formation, I made my Final Profession of Vows on August 22, 1973 at St. John the Baptist Mission Church in Easton as a witness to my commitment to the MSC way of life.

After four years at St. John the Baptist, I was given a full year to complete my studies and receive my bachelor's degree in Elementary Education. I taught the little ones for a year at St. Cyril and Methodius School in Reading, PA followed by two years teaching Grade 6 at St. Henry School in Philadelphia, PA. At the same time, I attended evening classes at Temple University in Philadelphia for the purpose of getting a master's degree in education with a focus on Supervision as I was asked to prepare for a school supervisory role.

In 1977, I was assigned to take up the role of School Principal at Our Lady of Hungary School in Northampton, PA. This experience was both exciting and fulfilling. Administration brought many challenges, but I developed new skills and learned much from the experience. I enjoyed serving in Northampton but after three years I was asked to take up the principal role at Holy Family Parish in Nazareth, PA. I was pleased that I could once again serve in an MSC Parish for four years. While serving as a school principal, I transferred my course credits from Temple University and undertook summer classes to pursue and complete a master's degree in educational administration from Villanova University.

Following these years of ministry and studies, I was granted a sabbatical year in 1984 at Our House of Prayer in West Reading, PA. I then returned to ministry and served as community superior while teaching at St. Henry School in Philadelphia, PA in 1985.

In 1986, our provincial superior asked me to serve on the provincial council with the responsibility of visiting and supervising the schools where our MSC Sisters were ministering. My secretarial and administrative skill helped me greatly during my seven years of service as a province councilor. I was able to visit the schools regularly and enjoyed having contact with the children and teachers where our MSC Sisters ministered.

As a Missionary Sister of the Sacred Heart, my greatest desire has been to bring others to know and experience God's deep love for each one of us. I gave my best wherever I was missioned and always found the children open and receptive. Working with families and assisting them in the formation of their children was both a privilege and blessing.

Belonging to an international congregation, I had the privilege of serving a few times as secretary at gatherings of our superiors/leaders and representatives from the congregation held in various countries every six years.

Having served two terms as a provincial councilor, I was given and deeply appreciated time to accompany my mother who was diagnosed with a terminal illness. In 1994, I celebrated my Silver Jubilee marking 25 years as a professed MSC Sister. I also had a scare personally with cancer and I experienced a difficult period after my mother passed away in 1996. I was grateful for the opportunity to participate in a one-year wellness program in Virginia.

Shortly after completing this program, I accepted a mission assignment in the south and served for four years as the Director of St. Gabriel Preschool in Mound Bayou, a small town in North Mississippi. Although our living situation was poor, we found joy in providing a good, stable and loving environment for the children with the help of their families and the parish. Unfortunately, sustaining the school became too great a challenge, so the Diocese phased out the program in 2001 and a new mission outreach program sponsored by another congregation began in the parish.

From Mississippi, I moved to Athens, Georgia where our MSC Sisters had been ministering both in healthcare at St. Mary's Hospital and as teachers at St. Joseph School. A Franciscan sister on staff at the Catholic Center at the University of Georgia living in community with us introduced me to the director, a Franciscan priest. Seeking a new ministry, I was grateful that a position to serve as an Administrative Secretary was available. My role there slowly expanded into other responsibilities within the faith community including preparing the young children of the families for First Eucharist. My seven years in this dynamic faith community in Athens, GA are among my most cherished memories.

In 2008, I represented our US Province at the General Chapter in Paffrath, Germany and was elected to serve as a councilor on the Congregational Leadership Team. I moved to our generalate in Italy and for six years worked with our leadership team, the General Superior and two other councilors from Namibia and Korea to promote our mission and meet the needs of our leaders and sisters serving in 20 countries worldwide. The general leadership team visited and worked with our leaders and sisters in the respective countries. Coming to know the various cultures was a true blessing and quite enriching. We collaborated closely with the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart, the Daughters of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart and the Laity of the Chevalier Family especially in the area of formation development since we share the same spirituality and mission entrusted to us by Jules Chevalier, MSC.

At the subsequent General Chapter held in Lima, Peru in 2014, I was elected as the General Superior of the Congregation which I found to be a humbling and challenging experience. Four sisters serving with me as general councilors were from Germany, Korea, Peru and Papua New Guinea. As a team we

focused on the formation of our members while supporting the unit leaders, our sisters and their ministries, responding to the needs of the Church and the challenges of a changing world and environment.

During my home visit to the U.S. in 2019, I joined our sisters in the province for an important provincial assembly. Following this gathering, the sisters, my family and friends joined me in celebrating my Golden Jubilee and giving thanks to God for my 50 years of life and service as a Professed MSC Sister.

Our term of six years as the congregational leadership team was extended to 8 years due to the Covid Pandemic which prevented us from holding the General Chapter in 2020. Although this unexpected worldwide crisis was filled with difficulties, it led us to explore and learn new ways of using technology to connect with one another for programs, planning and finding ways to enable ongoing collaboration. We rejoiced when we finally were able to hold our General Chapter in Rome in May 2022 to elect new congregational leadership.

In November 2022, I returned to the U.S. with a grateful heart for completing my 14 years of congregational leadership service and for all that I gained from this experience. Having time to readjust to life in my home country as I discern the journey ahead and God's plan for me has been a blessing! May the Sacred Heart of Jesus be loved everywhere!